

being between 3 and 4 ft. The eggs from this nest have been given to the British Museum, Natural History, South Kensington, London.

A friend of mine shot a female Pheasant-tailed Jaçana at Alwaye, in Travancore State, during the South-west Monsoon and obtained a fully formed oviduct egg from the bird.

The above records appear to establish that the breeding season is during the South-west Monsoon on the Malabar Coast.

LONDON,
January 3, 1954.

C. H. BIDDULPH

24. OCCURRENCE OF BRONZECAPPED OR FALCATED
TEAL (*EUNETTA FALCATA*) NEAR CALCUTTA

On the 24th January this year I was out duck shooting with Mr. F. A. Ainslie at the Salt Lakes within 25 miles of Calcutta. I was about to fire at a flight of duck when I noticed a pair flying at a lower level and got both with a right and left. I recognised the male as a Bronzecapped Teal immediately, and the female seemed to be of the same species. On returning home a reference to Stuart Baker and to the Fauna confirmed the fact that I had obtained a pair of Bronzecapped Teal.

I presented the two specimens to the zoological galleries, Indian Museum, Calcutta, and the Curator Shri M. N. Datta writes confirming that they are the Bronzecapped Teal representing both sexes and in full plumage. They are now on view in the Museum, and the drake with fully developed sickle-shaped secondaries is a most handsome bird.

All my books of reference state that the occurrence of these teal in India is very rare, and during all the years I have been shooting I have not heard of a specimen being recorded in India.

4/2 MIDDLETON STREET,
CALCUTTA,
April 14, 1954.

J. N. TAYLOR

[This duck has also been obtained in Samastipur District in Bengal, Patna (Bihar), Jhelum (Punjab), Roorkee (U.P.) and as far west as Sind and Kutch. Higgins in Assam saw 82 shot on 53 occasions between 1908-43. Attention has been drawn to the differences between this species and the gadwal in *JBNHS*, vol. 48: pp. 366-367.—Eds.]

25. BIRDS ASSOCIATING NATURAL PHENOMENA
WITH FOOD SUPPLY

In the *Ibis*, vol. 95 (1953) p. 142, Mr. W. W. A. Phillips published an interesting note entitled 'A Grass-fire Association of the Ceylon Swallow *Hirundo daurica hyperythra*' which calls to mind numerous instances of birds taking 'advantage' of grass or forest fires, and other natural phenomena. Not considering such commonplace

behaviour of sufficient interest, I did not commit my observations to paper. However, my observations are not restricted to 'fires' alone, but extend to the association of birds with the migrations of certain species of ants.

Birds soon learn to appreciate the advantages to be gained from natural occurrences, particularly where resulting in an increase in their food supply. Thus it is quite simple to see how the sign of smoke spells food in the 'mind' of some insectivorous birds. The behaviour of the birds present in the area at the time is a signal for others to join in the hunt. On many occasions I have witnessed birds 'going to a fire' and feeding on the insect and other life escaping from the smoke and flames. The birds did not only feed on the escaping fauna, but they also fed on the singed and partly roasted corpses left in the wake of the fire.

When in the Nepal Tarai in 1932, grass fires were frequent and on each occasion I observed large numbers of swallows, drongos (*Dicrurus*) and shrikes (*Lanius*) attracted to them. The birds frequently swooped down through smoke, and, not infrequently, were dangerously near to the flames. Birds ranged from 'fire level' upwards catching insects in the smoke. Some of the drongos would take up their positions on reeds in advance of the flames and make short sorties from their points of vantage, while others fed on the singed and partly roasted insects among the smouldering embers. Birds seem to come to the fire from all directions.¹

The congregations of birds at the marriage flights of ants and termites are too well-known and so need not be referred to here. Flights of locusts, however, are usually a sign for most birds to seek shelter, but some birds will feed on the fringes of the flights, and after the swarms have passed feed on the corpses left in the wake of the flights. Swarming bees are pursued by bee-eaters (*Merops*), the birds snatching a meal on the periphery of the swarm.

Migrant ants may be divided into two groups, the diurnal and nocturnal migrants. Of the two the former are of interest for purposes of this note. Although the ants are not preyed upon to any great extent, the fauna they disturb in the course of their migration is eagerly collected by birds and other animals.

On several occasions I have observed swarms of *Dorylus* sp. migrating in 'full formation' over the beds of dried ponds. The ants covered a very considerable portion of the beds. They went systematically through every crack and crevice of the drying clay driving everything before them, winged or otherwise—insects of all kinds, arachnids, myriapods, and even some small skinks and geckos—all hurried before the 'red-brown menace'. Several drongos, shrikes, and other insectivorous birds took advantage of the situation and swooped down on the fauna in flight, but did not attack the ants. Among the birds there was often an odd kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) taking toll of the lizards and mole-cricket (*Gryllotalpa*) as they hurried to safety.

¹ A specimen of the Shikra hawk, collected by the Mysore Ornithological Survey had all the primaries and some secondaries of one wing, and also the tail tip, considerably singed, no doubt accidentally while hunting in such a fired grass-and-scrub patch (JBNHS, 44 (1): 237.—Eps.

On other occasions I have witnessed the mass migration of a large black, highly polished, stinging ant (I cannot recall the name). This species migrates in enormous swarms, sometimes several yards wide and long. Such swarms appear like moving carpets of black! Like *Dorylus* they drive everything before them. They get into every crevice and under every stone and dislodge every form of life that might be there, or fall upon the victims and devour them on the spot. On one occasion I saw a 5 to 6 ft. Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosus*) dislodged by them from under a rock. The snake went for its life. In all cases I saw birds feeding on the wing and on the ground, but clear of the ants. No birds appeared to tackle the ants.

Such associations between birds and migrating ants are not uncommon. The sight of the abundance of insect life on such occasions and the behaviour of birds in the immediate vicinity of the swarm no doubt attracts more and more birds to the feast.

DOMINION MUSEUM,
WELLINGTON,
NEW ZEALAND,
May 11, 1953.

CHARLES McCANN, F.L.S.

26. SOME BIRD NOTES FROM CHINGLEPUT DISTRICT, MADRAS

1. On the night of 31st March I had an interesting visitor whose name, I think, should be recorded. This was a Bluethroated Flycatcher (*Cyornis rubeculoides*).

It turned up on the upstairs verandah where I was sitting, perhaps attracted by the light, and blundered about there, as birds on passage so often do. The blue and rusty colouring showed it to be something quite unusual. When startled, and occasionally while at rest it emitted very sharp and powerful 'cheeps' more tuneful than those of the Brown Flycatcher.

With some difficulty I was able to capture it from its perch on one of the rafters, and then had full opportunity to study it, though it proved a most unwilling captive. It was quite clearly a male Bluethroated Flycatcher and with Baker & Inglis in one hand and the bird in the other I was able to compare notes. The forehead blue was very brilliant, an electric blue, the other details were as described in 'Birds of Southern India' though I should say that the legs were rather lighter in colour than mentioned. The white of the abdomen was very pure.

I was happy when the little visitor flew safely off. As this place is only some 30 miles south of St. Thomas' Mount where Baker says that he saw his only specimen, we perhaps may hope that it is not quite such a rare visitor as he thought. I should, however, say that it was quite definitely a migrant. The whole behaviour of the bird reminded one of the Pittas who at this same time of year so often blunder on their way, getting trapped on verandahs, bumping into walls, and in general behaving quite unlike the same bird when living in the countryside. My wife thinks that she saw the same bird about